



ENROLLMENT
INSIGHTS 2021



INLAND EMPIRE TEENS AND COLLEGE

Student Perceptions,
Plans, and Obstacles



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OVERVIEW

Inland Empire teens (age 14-17 years old) see great value in a college degree to support their personal goals and dreams for their future. While not all teens are certain if college is in their future, they all see the value of college as it relates to professional achievement.

Teens who are certain they will go to college after high school have more concrete visions for the future, including colleges they hope to attend, activities they plan on doing once enrolled, friends they will make, as well as identified majors and careers.

Teens who are unsure about college are more likely to have vague visions of their future. They imagine traveling, nice homes in great locales, and when asked what they will need to do to reach those goals most indicate college would be a necessary step. These unsure teens talk about college and all the effort required both to get there as well as after they are enrolled. These teens are less likely to have specific majors/careers in mind and rarely think about college life beyond the classroom.

Teens have unrealistic expectations about college with almost all (including those unsure about college) assuming they will go straight to a 4-year college after high school. Even teens certain about their college plans envision attending colleges outside the IE, despite the fact that regional college-going trends suggest this is unlikely¹.

While only some teens envisioned living in specific places in the future, those that did want to live outside the IE in places like NYC, Chicago, and Santa Monica.

¹ Based on National Student Clearinghouse StudentTracker information shared by Riverside and San Bernardino County Offices of Education.

STUDY DESIGN

The study was originally intended to understand current Inland Empire teen perceptions of college. The study was designed to get teens past their surface perceptions (answers they regularly give parents and/or teachers) in order to better access their core beliefs.

METHOD

The study used a multimodal cognitive method, a qualitative technique developed by Dr. Yvonne Olivares, which combined cognitive interviewing techniques for memory retrieval (to move past changeable surface responses), journaling (for emotion clarification) and focus group elements (though in this study focus group elements were suspended to protect participants). Participants were allowed to use written, video, or imagery as mediums to express their responses to the research questions.

Data were collected using a representative sampling strategy to ensure that a diverse group of students in terms of race/ethnicity, income, and county of residence, were included.

RECRUITMENT

Study participants were initially recruited through their parent, though teen participants also completed screener questions to ensure consent.

- Study participants mandatory requirements
 - Must be resident of San Bernardino or Riverside County
 - Must be 14 – 17 years of age
 - Cannot have participated in research related to “college” in the past 6 months
 - Parent cannot work in advertising, marketing, public relations, or education (asked of parent)
- Study recruited mix of the following demographics
 - Race and ethnicity
 - Living wage status (calculated variable)
 - Gender (allowed for male, female, nonbinary)
 - Plan to go to college (yes, no, unsure)
- Additional prescreen collected data
 - School District

- Grade (7th, 8th, 9th...12th)
- Number of adults in household
- Number of children in household
- Household income (asked of parent)
- Zip Code (asked of parent)

STUDY GROUPINGS

Teens were grouped for analysis based on their response during recruitment to the question, “Do you plan to go to college?” Response options were yes, no, and unsure. These were used to create the following groups:

- Yes College
- Unsure College
- No College
 - Recruiting no college was difficult for this age group, likely due to their psychological development phase. This age group is actively exploring their beliefs, goals and values.

TIMELINE

Study was recruited July 6-26 and conducted on July 27-28, 2021.

STUDY CONTENT

Activities were designed to limit stress on teen participants brought on during self-reflection. This included modifying activities to allow for emotional distance and making certain each day’s last activity was a positive and/or empowering one.

Discussion Guide Activities Overview

- Day 1 – Tuesday July 27
 - Activity 1 – Introduction
 - Their family
 - What they do for fun/relax
 - Feelings about school
 - Activity 2 – Identifying their future goals
 - Where they’ll live
 - What they’ll do
 - Their priorities
 - Activity 3 – What they think it takes to reach 2031 goals
 - Identify college plans
 - Identify knowledge gaps to reach goals
- Day 2 – Wednesday July 28

- Activity 4 – Perception of college
 - Think about college in a new way, past surface answers normally provided to parents and teachers.
- Activity 5 – Sources of college advice
- Activity 6 – High school barriers to college enrollment
 - This age group has little control over barriers which is why having them identify obstacles via proxy, a friend transferring to their school, allows some distance from potentially painful or uncontrollable barriers.
- Activity 7 – Improving future educational success
 - This question serves dual purpose: first it assures the study ends on a positive and empowering note which is necessary to remove any unintended anxiety created through the activities; second, it may provide additional insights.

DATA COLLECTION PLATFORM

Qualboard was chosen as the data collection platform because it allowed participants to participate anytime, anywhere, from any device. Participants could flip back and forth between devices and even switch to text messaging if it better suited their communication needs. Participants could also choose to complete each day's activities in multiple or one-seating.

This platform also allowed participants to choose the communication medium that best suited them - be it written, video, or images.

VALUE OF COLLEGE

All teens focused on positive descriptions and imagery when expressing their perceptions of college. In follow-ups, all said college was very valuable, independent of their own certainty about whether college was in their future or not.

YES COLLEGE

Teens who expressed certainty about college plans, post-high school, focus on imagery and descriptions related to how college will provide social, travel, and professional opportunities. They often include multiple “social” or “fun group” images.

- *I chose these images because this is what I think my college career will be like. The first is making new friends and support system. The next is making time to study. the third is of course partying and having fun, have to release stress somehow. The fourth is reminding myself to take one step at a time and the final is graduating college. - Living Wage Yes, Female, 16, Mixed Race, 12th, Yes College*

UNSURE/NO COLLEGE

Teens who were uncertain, or no to college, focused on imagery and descriptions that spoke to individual effort required to achieve success and professional opportunities open only to those who go to college. Unsure/no teens were less likely to include “social” or “fun group” imagery or descriptions of college.

- *College is a catalyst for opportunities. It presents endless doors for me to go through and allows me to access my full potential. Like anything else, you get what you put into it, so for me college will be lots of hard work as I want to get the most out of it. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 16, Vietnamese, 11th, Unsure College*

There was no pattern on who self-identified as yes or unsure college based on race/ethnicity, age, grade or living wage status.

COST OF COLLEGE

Cost of college was not a common theme, however when it did arise it was from **unsure** teens of color who talked about:

- Concerns about their own ability to complete a college degree
 - *I do think it is worth it. I'd like to give it a good shot, but don't want to waste the money of it turns out not so great. So maybe I would try a community college, or see what grants are out there for college. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 15, Native American, Unsure College, 10th*
- Cost horror stories
 - *Making education cheaper, I've heard stories of people going homeless because, they couldn't afford the college that they were going to. I know how hard this is and how much it will cost, but that's really all I can think about right now, as it scares me from the thought of college. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 14, Asian American, 9th, Unsure College*
- Cost to their parent
 - *College will cost my dad a lot of money. - Living Wage Yes, Female, 16, Hispanic, 11th, Unsure College*

COLLEGE PLANS

Teens who are yes college are more likely to name specific college(s) in how they plan to reach their future goals than those who are unsure/no college.

YES COLLEGE

Almost all teens certain about their college plans identified specific colleges outside the IE. Many of these named colleges were unrealistic based on regional college going trends. When asked "why that college" teens said they chose the college because it was:

- Famous or prestigious (though none noted visiting the colleges or having insight into the famous/prestigious college)
 - *Because NYU is my dream college because I want to live in New York but I really don't know much about the university other than what I've seen on TV. I don't want to go to a closer college because I want to live somewhere that is further and different. I can see myself living in the Eastcoast. I have a book humans of new york and it's always looked cool. - Living Wage No, Male, 14, Caucasian and Hispanic, 9th, Yes College*
 - *Today I need to work towards fully completing my AP summer homework-Along the way I have to graduate from High School and I hope to attend a prestigious university such as M.I.T., Cal Tech, U.C Berkeley, or Stanford... The actual content of the course is what matters to me most when choosing a college, as well as their resources and quality of teaching. I've found that this has resulted in many of the more prestigious colleges take precedent in my choice when compared to others. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 15, Hispanic/ Black, 11th, Yes College*
- Known for specialization they need for their future career
 - *I chose San Diego State because I hear that they have a good robotics and computer science course and I would move to Santa Monica because there is a NASA facility*

there. - Living Wage No, Male, 17, Caucasian, Yes College, 12th

- *I heard that SDSU has good biology classes and that can also help you get a job in speleology...I also have a sister going to SDSU so I can ask her what it's like and what they look for in students. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 14, Asian American, 9th, Unsure College*
- **Prior college visit/tour**
 - *The reason I chose UCLA was because we use to live in Los Angeles and I our schools would take us to different colleges. When we went to UCLA I just knew this was the college I wanted to go to. I loved the campus and everything they stand for plus it's an amazing school for basketball. - Living Wage No, Male, 15, Black / African American, 10th, Yes College*
 - *I'm hoping to get a trade in information technology to pay for school at least 30 percent and then I'll be going to USC San Marcos [sic]. Why because I have family that attends and I'm familiar with the campus. I want to major in engineering - Living Wage Yes, Female, 17, Black / African American, 11th, Yes College*

UNSURE/NO COLLEGE

Teens uncertain about college are less likely to name specific college(s) when discussing how they plan to reach their future goals.

- *I plan to get this education at a HBCU but I don't know a specific one yet [WHY?] Going to an HBCU would be a different kind of environment and I would be around people who get what I go through racially. - Living Wage No, Female, 17, Black / African American, 12th, Unsure College*
- *I have no specific place in mind for my undergrad years. When the time comes, which will be shortly, I'll have to think about my college applications. That process seemed really stressful and un-enjoyable for my older brother so I am not looking forward to it. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 16, Vietnamese, 11th, Unsure College*

2-YEAR VS. 4-YEAR COLLEGE

Of IE high school grads who go to college, 58% go to a 2-year institution²

Almost all teens assume they would go straight to a 4-year college from high school.

YES COLLEGE

All but one “yes college” teen said they planned to go to a 4-year college/university.

The one teen who specified a community college plan said their choice was based on successful parental example.

- *Both my parents went to community college so feel better about going to a community college instead of a four-year college. The community college I'm considering is the same one they both went to because they both went there. - Living Wage No, Female, 17, Hispanic, 12th, Yes College*

UNSURE/NO COLLEGE

Most “unsure college” teens also said they would go straight to a 4-year college/university, if they went to college.

Only one “unsure college” teen specified a community college plan.

- *The things I need to do today to become the person I want to in 2031 is find out what classes and degree I need to become a mental health professional and the different ways I can advocate for those who can't speak up. I would like to attend the local community college after I graduate high school and*

²Calculated using most recent data available from California Department of Education: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/cgrinfo.asp>

*then switch to a 4 year college. - Living Wage No, Female,
16, Caucasian, 12th, Unsure College*

NAMED COLLEGES

CSUSB

Largest regional university, yet not named by any students

Named in-state colleges

- CalPoly
- Caltech
- CSU Fullerton
- CSU Long Beach (named as UC Long Beach)
- CSU Northridge
- CSU San Marcos (named as USC San Marcos)
- San Diego State U (abbreviated as CSSD, SDSU)
- UC Berkeley
- UC Irvine
- UC Los Angeles (by 3 of 27 teens)
- UC Sacramento
- USC

Named out-of-state colleges

- Brigham Young U
- Columbia
- Grand Canyon U
- Harvard
- NYU
- MIT
- Southern Oregon U
- U of Nevada
- U of Utah
- Yale

Colleges specifically named as a “back-up”

- San José State U
- UC Riverside
- UC Santa Cruz

COLLEGE MAJORS

Teens certain about going to college were more likely than unsure/no college teens to know (or believe they know) their intended major or educational path. This was independent of race/ethnicity, age, gender, grade, and living wage status.

Named Majors

- Criminal Justice & Law
- Finance/Accounting/Business Management
- IT
- Nursing
- Robotics & Computer Science
- Science/Biology
- Speleology/Geology

Named Educational Paths

- Business
- Engineer
- General Degree at Community College
- Medical School (by 2 of 27 teens)
- Mental Health Profession
- Teacher

UNSURE/NO COLLEGE

Nearly half the teens self-identified as unsure or no college during recruitment but when they were asked to vision board their future selves in 2031 and detail steps they needed to take, **almost all teens identified college as a necessary step** to achieve the vision of themselves in the year 2031.

Those few who remained unsure/no about a need for college, after the vision board and action step activities, said they:

- Do not believe they need college to achieve life goals
 - *I probably will own my own business doing nails or whatever. I'll still go out with my friends. - Living Wage Yes, Female, 15, Black / African American, 11th, Unsure College*
- Uncertain if they would be successful in college due to past academic struggles
 - *I am a medicated ADHD, I have a hard time with schooling. High school classes are hard enough for me, I'm pretty sure if college classes are more difficult. Just a thought though, haven't made a decision yet - Living Wage Yes, Male, 15, Native American, Unsure College, 10th*

There was no pattern on who self-identified as unsure college based on race/ethnicity, age, grade or living wage status.

COLLEGE RESOURCES

There was no pattern on the number of college resources teens had based on race/ethnicity, age, grade or living wage status.

NO RESOURCE

Only one teen had no idea where to turn to with questions about college/training including applications, programs, financial aid, scholarships/grants, and college life.

- *I don't really have anyone to turn to for those things. - Living Wage Yes, Female, 16, Asian Indian, 11th, Yes College*

SINGLE RESOURCE – MOST COMMON

Teens who identified only a singular source of information relied on:

- School counselor as a believed but not known source (independent of age/grade)
 - *I may be wrong, but I believe it is the counselor. - Living Wage Yes, Male, 14, Asian American, 9th, Unsure College*
- Online searches
 - *The internet - Living Wage No, Female, 17, Black / African American, 12th, Unsure College*
- Older sibling/cousin
 - *I turn to my brother because I believe in him the most and trust him the most to help guide me through the process. - Living Wage Yes, 17, Asian American, 12th, Unsure College, Male*

MULTIPLE RESOURCES

Teens who named multiple resources usually named some combination of:

- School counselor
- Parent who went to college
- Online resources
- Contacting college they are applying to (primarily 12th graders)

Teens who listed school counselors as one of multiple resources were more likely to also say they had a parent with higher education experience (independent of race, age, grade, and/or living wage status).

- *I will talk to a school counselor, because I think they will have the most and best information. I remember that my mom said her high school counselor really helped a lot when she was getting ready to go to college. I will probably do a google search to see if I can find any information on my own too. I will also talk to my parents, since they have both been to college before. - Caucasian, 9th, Yes College, Female, 14, Living Wage No*

APPENDIX

NOTES ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ANTICIPATING RETURN TO SCHOOL POST COVID SHUTDOWN

IE teens are lonely and feeling socially isolated. When asked about returning to school almost all expressed excitement about making new friends.

- *What I'm most looking forward to is making new friends. - Living Wage No, Male, 14, Caucasian/Hispanic, 9th, Yes College*

When asked, "What are you most dreading about school?"

- **African American teens** were more likely to express concerns or reluctance about returning to an in-person experience, though their reasons varied.
 - *I'm dreading going back in to school. I liked it better when it was online. - Living Wage No, Male, 15, Black / African American, 10th, Yes College*
 - *I dread school or going back because I feel like this pandemic has shifted my inspection and drive .yes I will push through to be a educated black woman but I feel robbed of my high school experience - Living Wage Yes, Female, 17, Black / African American, 11th, Yes College*
- **Hispanic teens** were more likely to express concerns about unknown in-person expectations.
 - *I'm dreading how what schools what's going to look like when I come back in august because of covid- Living Wage No, Male, 16, Hispanic, 10th, Yes College*
 - *I'm honestly dreading going back to school and everything being different but hopefully that's not the case . - Living Wage Yes, Female, 17, Hispanic, 11th, Yes College*
- One **trans teen** shared concerns about returning to in-person environment after coming out during the pandemic.
- No differences between or among other groups.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The following outlines demographics for participating teens (n=27). A total of 30 students were recruited for an aim of 25 completes.

K-12 SCHOOLS REPRESENTED	
Citrus Valley High School	Ramona High School
El Cerrito Middle School	Rancho Cucamonga High School
Eleanor Roosevelt High School	Redlands High School
Etiwanda High School	Temescal Canyon High School
Granite Hills High School	Upland High School
Green Valley High School	Victor Valley High School
Hemet High School	Vista Murrieta High School
Heritage High School	West Valley High School
J.W. North High School	Western Christian
Keith McCarthy Academy	Yucaipa High School
Perris High School	

COUNTY	COUNT	PERCENT
Riverside	16	59.26%
San Bernardino	11	40.74%

GRADE	COUNT	PERCENT
8th	1	3.7%
9th	4	14.8%
10th	5	18.5%
11th	9	33.3%
12th	8	29.6%

AGE	COUNT	PERCENT
14 years old	5	18.5%
15 years old	5	18.5%
16 years old	9	33.3%
17 years old	8	29.6%

GENDER¹	COUNT	PERCENT
Female	13	48.15%
Male	14	51.85%

¹Though non-binary was an option it was not chosen during recruitment self-identification.

LIVING WAGE²	COUNT	PERCENT
No	13	48.15%
Yes	14	51.85%

²Living wage was calculated based on location, HH income, number of adults and number of children residing in the home.

PLAN TO GO TO COLLEGE	COUNT	PERCENT
No³	2	7.41%
Unsure	10	37.04%
Yes	15	55.55%

³Difficult to recruit for no college for this age group.

RACE / ETHNICITY GROUPS⁴	COUNT	PERCENT
Asian/Asian American/ Asian Indian/Vietnamese	5	18.52%
Black/African American	8	29.63%
Hispanic/Latinx	6	22.22%
Native American	1	3.70%
Two or More Races	3	11.11%
White/Caucasian	7	25.93%

⁴Count and percent higher than the total sample because 3 participants self-identified into multiple groups (this is beyond those who self-identified as "Two or More Races").

NUMBER OF ADULTS IN HH	COUNT	PERCENT
1	5	18.5%
2	11	40.74%
3	8	29.63%
4	2	7.41%
7	1	3.7%

- One in six participating teens lived with only one adult in the household.
- One in three participating teens lived in a household that had three or more adult in the household.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HH	COUNT	PERCENT
1	10	37.04%
2	9	33.3%
3	4	14.8%
4	2	7.41%
5	2	7.41%

- One in three participating teens was the only child living in the household at the time this study was completed.
- One in three participating teens was living in a two-child household.

HH INCOME	COUNT	PERCENT
Less than \$25,000	3	11.11%
\$25,000 - \$49,000	6	22.22%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	7	25.93%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	3	11.11%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	2	7.41%
\$125,000 or more	6	22.22%